

Testimony of
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Subcommittee of Water Resources and Environment
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
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Chairman Duncan and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Ann Pesiri Swanson. I have worked on Chesapeake Bay restoration for more than two decades and have served for the last 16 years as Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the tri-state legislative body that coordinates Bay-related policy across state lines for Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on H.R. 4688, the Chesapeake Bay Reauthorization Act.

I urge the subcommittee to support this bill.

The Congress first authorized the Chesapeake Bay Program 20 years ago at a time when the natural abundance of the Bay was in serious decline. The hope was that this new, innovative program would provide the coordination among federal, state and local partners that would lead to the Bay's restoration.

When the Congress reauthorized the program in 2000, it made special note of two important facts. First, the Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure and a resource of worldwide significance. And second, that the original cooperative program serves as a national and international model for the management of estuaries.

Today I am here to urge the Congress to once again reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Program because both of those facts are still true: The Bay is a magnificent natural resource and the cooperative Chesapeake Bay Program is a model of estuarine restoration.

I have had the privilege during my career to travel across the country and indeed around the world to meet with others who are working on watershed restoration efforts. And everywhere I go, the Chesapeake Bay Program is the model that others want to emulate. The reason is simple: The Bay Program works.

Last year was an especially difficult year for the Chesapeake Bay. Near-record precipitation washed massive amounts of nutrients and sediment off the 64,000 square miles of the Bay watershed, flooding the Bay with non-point pollution. The result was a summer of low dissolved oxygen, a major die-back of critical Bay grasses, and poor shellfish harvests.

In spite of those setbacks, I can honestly say that the Program is a success. Acting together, the Bay Program partners have reduced the amount of harmful

nitrogen flowing into the Bay annually by 60 million pounds. We have made similar progress in controlling phosphorus and sediments. These important reductions have come at a time when the population of the Bay Watershed has soared and the regional economy has boomed. While other watershed restoration efforts across the country and around the world have faltered in the face of such growth, we in the Chesapeake Bay have made modest progress.

Today our states are adopting new, ecologically-based water quality standards that recognize the different needs of the Bay's living resources and not artificial political boundaries. Similarly, the partners are developing new Tributary Strategies, river-specific cleanup plans that will dramatically lower pollutants flowing into the Bay.

We still have enormous amounts of work to do. But we have the right framework in place. The Chesapeake Bay Program is recognized as the national leader in establishing environmental goals based on sound science, developing indicators to measure progress, and helping the states and the federal government work cooperatively in this most challenging effort.

At a time when partisanship has bitterly divided many elected officials over environmental initiatives, the Bay Program continues to attract near-universal bipartisan support. That is true in my Bay Commission states, and it is true in the Congress. In that regard, I want to take special note of the outstanding leadership of two Members, including one on this panel.

Senator Paul Sarbanes was the primary author of the last Bay reauthorization and has been a constant supporter of Bay initiatives.

His leadership in the Senate is rock solid. In this body, Congressman Wayne Gilchrest, has staked out a national reputation on environmental issues. His leadership on Chesapeake Bay issues is unrivaled. We are fortunate to have both these legislative leaders, from two different parties, as our champions.

H.R. 4688 would reauthorize the Chesapeake Bay Program for another five years. I urge this body and the Congress as a whole to pass this critical legislation and put the Program partners back to work. We are facing major challenges, and your strong support continues to be vital to our goal of restoring and protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

I truly believe that the Chesapeake Bay Program offers us the best chance in the nation to address watershed degradation that is multi-state in nature and largely non-point source in origin. If we cannot do it here, I don't think we can be successful anywhere. But if we can be successful, as I believe we must, then we will have a model for the entire world to follow.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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